

Thoughts and Suggestions on Early Education.

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We will begin with saying what will be generally allowed to be true, namely, that book-learning is only a small part of true education; its fullest requirements are very varied. We must cultivate besides obedience, self-control, reverence, respect for authority, the power of concentration, the ability to observe and to take in the qualities and the appearances of the natural objects around us; devotion to duty and enthusiasm; tenderness and affection and sympathy. With some these three last seem to be spontaneous.

Parents should first teach their children obedience. Quiet persistence with great gentleness will prove most effective. Young children should not be excited; they will be over-awed by steady firmness. If this plan is followed for a short time the habit begins to grow. With some children it appears to me that it may be sometimes desirable to punish for disobedience instead of persisting and exacting the fulfilment of the injunction. But this need only be done when children are specially obstinate and stubborn, and it is well always to avoid very authoritative commands, which rouse up resistance. Self-control can be taught to very young children, first by distracting their attention, and then by inducing them to be brave.

Sympathy young children must have, and that will help to excite in them love, reverence, and respect for authority. Until children are got under some degree of discipline there should, if possible, be no hurry with them; they require to be treated leisurely and gently. But by degrees they should be taught that there is not time for this kind of treatment, that they have

outgrown it, and ought to render obedience promptly and use self-control. Self-control will be wanted about toys, games, and all sorts of small matters, if children are very much mixed up with others. A quiet explanation of the wisdom and desirability of self-control may be of use to young children, not at the time when they are losing self-control, but afterwards when the trouble has passed away, or perhaps just before they are likely to be in danger of being tried in some way. Let this talk be done in secret, and it ought not to be very long. Just a few emphatic words would be enough.

Reverence should come from those around them, from what they see and hear. They will surely hear stories of good and brave men and women, and noble deeds which will excite hero worship.

The ability to observe should be developed early. There are so many things that children delight in. In the country fruits, flowers, and animals; even in town there is much to divert them. There are sure to be some gardens to be seen, and always the sun, moon and stars, and the clouds. Then there will be visits to the sea and the country. But it seems to me that for several years their young minds need not be set to work very vigorously; they should open slowly and gradually, not be forced preternaturally, with the risk that the early buds may be nipped off by the frosts of illness. All this concerns parents. They may no doubt be helped by kindergarten schools and teachers, but they will not wish or desire to give up their own share in the education of their children.

No doubt the teaching of trained kindergarten teachers is most valuable and useful to mothers who are very fully occupied, and who have small homes and many duties. But there are disadvantages for young children, especially for the delicate ones. It might be very useful if classes could be formed to instruct young girls who wished to be nursery governesses or nursemaids in the kindergarten system. An occasional visit from an experienced teacher might keep the young maidens in the right way; and a small fee might cover the expense. Might not a well-established kindergarten in a large town take up work of this kind? or a large Board School form a class for the elder girls, in which the principles and the way of dealing with children theoretically, as well as practically, could be taught? The classes in infant schools and in kindergartens

would show the working practically. Three or six months' training would be most valuable, and the girls would get situations more easily, either as nursery governesses or nursery-maids, afterwards. I have been told that this plan is adopted in Germany. I feel sure that many parents would prefer letting their nurses learn, or taking nursemaids who had been trained, to sending their children to the schools. The going and coming makes a great difficulty. The children very often cannot be sent regularly, and the excitement of being with a large number is often injurious.

It is most desirable that children should begin early to learn foreign languages, their organs are flexible and can easily form new sounds; they ought to learn to speak and to read both English and one foreign language between four and seven or eight. It is very important to secure a good pronunciation. The grammar may be left alone at first, and later, perhaps about six, French and English grammar might be taught together. The differences between the two languages might be made an amusement. There are many nice little story books. I may mention those in the Rose Series, to be had at Hachette's, London, and it is probable there are good German books to be had there. If children do not acquire a facility in speaking another language early, it is most difficult to do so later, and one language often helps in the acquisition of another. In these times when people move about so much, a knowledge of languages seems most indispensable. They may tend to unite different nations together, for intercourse will teach them to understand each other better, and we may hope to remove prejudices. We do not learn to know a country and to understand the people simply by passing hastily through it. We ought to become acquainted with the people by means of social intercourse. If children learn early the right accent, and if they acquire a vocabulary, they can the more easily understand, and this might be done when they are young. The grammatical part of the language can be got up when they are older and more able to enter into the subject. It is difficult to get the two first parts attended to thoroughly at schools. Something might be done at home first.

When children reach the age of seven, or even rather earlier, it will be very profitable to read to them books of history and adventure and of travel. Parents can select what is best, and

skip what is undesirable. They can thus bring before their children what is best and greatest in the lives of many great men, and explain what is the other side of the picture. For a while, perhaps, we may be allowed to dwell on the bright side of things, though we ought not to go on concealing all that is dark and dreadful. It appears to me that with regard to religious reading it is best to begin with the Bible and not with Bible stories. The beautiful language of the Bible and the pathetic narratives are deeply impressed on children's minds. Hymns are very important and very helpful.

Geography can be taught very easily to the very young by the use of maps and by conversation. Interest in various countries can be excited by giving an account of the scenery, the manners and customs of the people, their state in former times, the present form of government, the climate, and the various productions. The history of remarkable towns and distinguished people will also come into the lessons. It is time enough to begin very definite studies when children are nine or ten years of age. It is better to let them acquire first a real interest in several subjects, and to give time for finding out their tastes. Music and drawing might be begun so far as to see whether it would be desirable to continue the cultivation of these arts; but a quiet happy life is the best beginning for young children. Children often do suffer greatly; they have often to contend with very serious faults and dispositions. If parents can carefully watch over them and teach them the right way of contending with and overcoming these defects, it will be a great blessing and help in future years. There is much more to be said, especially about special religious training; but that is too large a subject for the present paper.

